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Mayes and Barcia Introduce Plan to Ban Winter Utility Shutoffs

Comprehensive plan requires utilities to work with customers struggling with rising costs

LANSING - State Representative Jeff Mayes (D-Bay City) and State Senator Jim Barcia (D-Bay City) today introduced a bipartisan, bicameral package of bills that will protect residents during the harsh Michigan winter by banning utility shutoffs during the winter months.

"With heating costs rising and families across Michigan struggling to make ends meet, a utility bill can become a big expense," said Mayes, Chair of the House Energy and Technology Committee. "This is especially true for our most vulnerable residents, such as those living on fixed incomes. When being able to turn on the heat means the difference between life and death, we need to make sure that utilities are doing everything they can to prevent shutoffs during dangerous weather."

The plan, which was introduced in both the House and Senate:

- Permanently bans winter shutoffs for all utilities from Dec. 1 to March 31.
- Requires utilities to give all customers at least 15 days notice before shutoff either in person or by certified mail.

Places all utility providers, including municipal electric companies, under the authority of the Public Service Commission (PSC) for provisions governing shutoffs.

Prevents providers from using electric limiters until the PSC establishes uniform standards governing their usage.

Mayes and Barcia's plan aims to prevent another tragedy like that of 93-year-old World War II veteran Marvin Schur. Schur was found frozen to death in his Bay City home on Jan. 17 after Bay City Electric Light and Power placed an electric limiter on his home. Under current law, Bay City Electric Light and Power is not subject to PSC rules as a municipal utility.

"The tragic death of Marvin Schur must serve as a call to action," said Barcia, who introduced the plan in the Senate. "We cannot afford to sit idly by while more of Michigan's working families are left out in the cold. Michigan needs this plan, especially during these tough economic times."

The plan puts strict penalties on utilities that improperly shut off electric service to

customers. Any fines collected from a violation could go toward the Low Income & Efficiency Fund, which provides shut-off protections for low-income residents while promoting energy efficiency programs. The plan also requires electric providers to work with state and local agencies and credit services in order to help consumers obtain assistance if they're having trouble paying their bills.

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